

## Topography and Geology

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### Topography

It straggles along the highway to Norwich. So begins the Bunwell entry in Arthur Mee's *Norfolk*.<sup>1</sup> How well that captures the essence of the village. Most of the settlement is away from the B1113 road (the Turnpike) leaving the church and school in seeming isolation from the rest of the community. In many villages this might indicate a shift of occupation during the medieval plague years, but this is almost certainly not the case here. Kelly's Directory likewise sums it up as, 'a parish and irregularly built village straggling the road from Norwich to Bury St. Edmunds'.



Figure 1, The Queen's Head Public House and the Turnpike looking towards Norwich ca.1915.

Travelling along this same road today the casual passer-by would be totally unaware of the diversity of buildings and landscape elsewhere in the village as it stretches to Wymondham in the north and to Tibenham in the south. The village has an area of some 2,495 acres and forms part of the Depwade Hundred. The main centres of village life today are; Bunwell Street alongside the road to Attleborough (which includes the Greenways estate), Bunwell Hill (once important for its brick kilns), and Bunwell Low Common on the way to Aslacton. In Medieval times this latter area is believed to have been known (at least in part if not wholly) as Haddeston or Haddeston in Bunwell. Francis Blomefield gave this name as deriving from a holy stone or cross erected here but his references are not given and like much of his toponymy it should not be relied upon.<sup>2</sup> A far more likely derivation is from a Late

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<sup>1</sup>Arthur Mee, *The King's England: Norfolk*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972), p.47.

<sup>2</sup>Francis Blomefield, *An Essay towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk*, 11 vols (London: William Miller, 1805-1810), v5 (1806), pp.131-141. Francis Blomefield died in 1752 with his work incomplete. His friend Charles Parkin, who completed the remainder of the work including the pages on Bunwell, failed to match Blomefield's standards of accuracy and detail.

Saxon personal name, perhaps Haeda, and therefore the tun (dwelling place) of the people of Haeda (Haeda's tun).

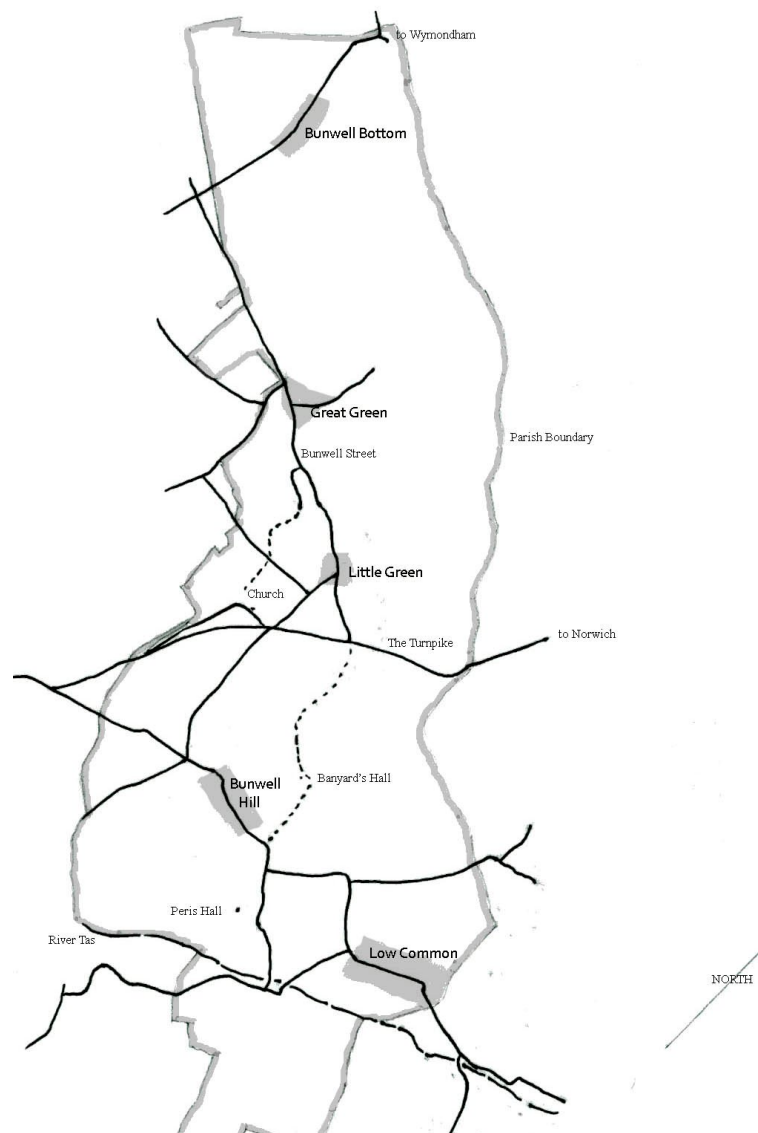


Figure 2, Parish of Bunwell Showing Areas of Principal Settlement.

The Domesday Book refers only to Hadestuna or Hatestuna, again likely to refer to the areas then covered by the Banyards Hall and Peris Hall estates in the south of the village. The name BUNWELL first occurs as BUNEWELL in AD 1198 and means a spring or stream where reeds grow (from Old English 'bune' + 'wella'). This refers to the river Tas which rises in nearby Carleton Fen and travels east along some of the parish boundary on its way towards Norwich.<sup>3</sup>

Virtually all the land in Bunwell drains into the Tas, apart from the NW end (Bunwell Bottom) which drains via various channels into the River Tiffey at Wymondham. The highest land above mean sea level lies in the Great Green area where it is some 70 metres above Ordnance Datum. The church itself is built on a 60 metre contour line. The lowest parts are in the Tas valley around Bunwell Fen where contours of 35 metres above OD are shown on the map.

<sup>3</sup> The long distance footpath 'The Tas Valley Way' from New Buckenham to Mulbarton follows the route of the River Tas through the Parish of Bunwell.



Figure 3, Low Common ca. 1915.

The marshland and meadows associated with the Tas are a feature of the southern part of the village, particularly in the Low Common area, and form a valuable wildlife resource. The rest of the village is mainly agricultural in usage with one dominant landowner – the Easton family. How the agriculture of the village has changed over the centuries will be dealt with in another chapter. Suffice to say currently the rich boulder clay soils, and a few lighter ones near the river, mainly support crops of wheat, barley and sugar beet. Recent years have also seen the addition of crops such as oilseed rape, flax, and potatoes. Nostalgic villagers will remember the unique time in the 1950s when Morse the rose growers from Horsham St. Faith near Norwich planted fields of roses on Easton's land at Banyards Hall. The sight of millions of rose petals in the air during one of the frequent mini-whirlwinds of summer (or 'rogers' as Norfolk people call them) is never to be forgotten.



Figure 4, Banyards Hall ca. 1898.



Figure 5, Bunwell Hill ca. 1915



Figure 6, Bunwell Street ca.1930

## Geology

The underlying geology of the region is the upper chalk of the Cretaceous period, formed some 70 to 80 million years ago at the bottom of a warm, shallow, tropical sea. On this seabed lived relatives of today's sea urchins (echinoids) surrounded by corals, sponges, and molluscs such as *Gryphaea* (a common local fossil popularly known as Devils Toe Nails due to their shape). Above them swam ammonites and belemnites (extinct relatives of today's squid and octopus), who were preyed upon by an assortment of fish, sharks, and now extinct marine reptiles such as mosasaurs, plesiosaurs and ichthyosaurs. Fossil parts of many of these creatures (especially sea urchins and belemnites) can be found in the fields and gardens of Bunwell and neighbouring villages although they are not in their original context within the chalk. They have been moved around the landscape by the glaciers of the various Ice Ages, and by the many rivers that sprang forth from the ice sheets as they melted.



Figure 7, Typical Boulder Clay Fossils. L to R: Group of Ammonites, Single Ammonite, Sponge, Sea Urchins, Devil's Toe Nail, Belemnite, Bi-valve Shell.

Above the chalk lie the agriculturally rich soils of the chalky boulder clay known to geologists as the Lowestoft Till. These deposits form the wide, slightly undulating plateaux which are so characteristic of mid Norfolk and Suffolk. Today this soil grows good crops of grain and sugar beet but has at times also supported large herds of dairy cattle, as well as having been utilised for pottery and brick production. It contains many pieces of chalk and flints from the Cretaceous rocks that are now deeply buried here. It also contains many stones varying from sarsen boulders to small pebbles of sandstone, granite and many other types of rock. Those that have travelled large distances due to glacial action are referred to as erratics.

In South Norfolk and Suffolk the more impervious, clayey (Kimmeridgian) boulder clays (especially where close to major river valleys) have been converted by surface water erosion into relatively hilly, rolling landforms. Near to the river Tas (and also beside related watercourses) are pockets of clayey sand, locally pebbly, as well as some peat and peaty clay deposits. These latter soils were important in the early colonisation of the region.

The current Post-Glacial period in which we live today started with the major melting of the ice sheets about 11,000 years ago. East Anglia was joined to the European Continent by land until about 8,000 years ago. The first real evidence of actual occupation by man locally dates from this period (the 3000 ice-free years when we were part of the European land mass). Such evidence consists of worked flint blades, waste flakes and flint cores. These would have been left behind by seasonal hunter-gatherers who camped on the lighter sandy soils near to the present River Tas. They would have been in search of game and birds, as well as other food, from the marshland and woodland that would have predominated in the local landscape. This Mesolithic culture, as we now refer to it, began the long (and probably continuous) occupation of the area that leads us to the present day.

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